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SUBJECT: RRT ERBIL: AMBASSADOR MEETS BARZANI AND BARHAM
SALIH IN ERBIL

BAGHDAD 00000183 001.2 OF 002

Classified By: RRT Erbil Team Leader Andrew Snow for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (U) This is an RRT Erbil cable.

12. (C) Summary. On January 18 in Erbil, the Ambassador met separately with Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) President Masoud Barzani and KRG PM Barham Salih. Both were sympathetic to U.S. concerns about the political aspects of the de-Ba'athification controversy on election preparations. Regarding the Kongra Gel armed resistance group (PKK), Barzani said he was trying to determine whether the PKK's choice to continue killing was a unified view. On the economic side, PM Salih announced a new KRG initiative to resolve its dispute with the GOI over pre-2005 producing oil fields and sought U.S. help. He also pointed with pride to KRG moves towards merging the four Peshmerga brigades and unifying the budget, but said that merger of the asayish (Kurdish intelligence force) would require a legal fix. Salih urged the USG to establish a consulate in Erbil, but stressed, only half-jokingly, that "We're not going to give away Kirkuk for a consulate." End Summary.

DE-BA'ATHIFICATION

13. (C) KRG President Barzani told the Ambassador that the timing of the de-Ba'athification effort was unnecessary and highly politicized. He said that the Kurds would not get involved in the defense of any one particular candidate because they could not be seen as "soft" on Baathists. Barzani agreed with Ammar al-Hakim's proposal that candidates identified for disqualification, but who made a public statement reaffirming loyalty to the Constitution and denouncing Ba'athism, should be able to run in the national parliamentary elections. Regarding a proposal to vet candidates after winning but before seating, Barzani expressed concern that people might discount the elections if open list candidates they voted for were removed after the election.

14. (C) Barzani said he was not surprised by the recent turn of events. He noted the Shi'a were already talking about revenge against Ba'athists at an Iraqi opposition conference in London in 2002. Although he supported Ammar al-Hakim's proposal to ameliorate the situation, he recounted a part of his personal history with the Ba'athists. He said 1991 was the first time he had traveled to Baghdad to negotiate with the Ba'athists and had a one-on-one meeting with Saddam Hussein. When Saddam asked "How do you feel?" Barzani told Saddam, "Thirty-seven members of my personal family have perished, 8,000 from my village of Barzan have died, and 180,000 Kurds are missing. I had to wade through a sea of blood to come to this meeting, and I am only here in front of you as a sacrifice for the Kurdish people." Barzani said Saddam looked away. Barzani recalled that he packed his bags and left Baghdad as quickly as he could because he was sure Saddam's Ba'athists planned to kill the Kurdish delegation.

GOVERNMENT FORMATION

¶6. (C) Barzani agreed with the Ambassador that the next Prime Minister should be an individual who would unify Iraqis. He did not rule out that the next PM might end up a surprise from a political deal, but made clear he did not consider Maliki a strong candidate for the premiership. Barzani said Maliki was inclined towards dictatorship because no other institutions stopped him, and implied that power had corrupted him. Referencing the Kurd-Arab military stand-off in Khanaqin in August 2008, Barzani stressed that the Kurds need a PM that would not resort to tanks. The PM will only be successful with a good cabinet. (Note: Barzani's Chief of Staff Fuad Hussein was less circumspect, telling PolCouns later that day that Barzani opposed another term for Maliki Qlater that day that Barzani opposed another term for Maliki and favored VP Abd al-Mahdi for the job. End note.)

REMEMBER THE CONSTITUTION

¶7. (C) Barzani stated he has never viewed U.S. strength as being only military in nature. He recognized that the United States had made a commitment to the Iraqis, and stressed that it must support the constitution as it was what bound all Iraqis together.

TURKEY/PKK

¶8. (C) During dinner, Barzani expressed his satisfaction with the visits to Erbil in late 2009 of Turkey's FM Davutoglu and Minister of Interior Atalay. Barzani contrasted the way Turkish officials now speak to him with the way they used to address him, "like he was their brigade commander." Barzani said he could not accept the PKK's practice of killing people, and was trying to determine whether the PKK is unified in endorsing violence, or whether there are some who want peace.

¶9. (C) Separately, at the meeting with PM Salih which had preceded the meeting and dinner with Barzani, DPM Barwary saw Turkey as competing with Iran in the region, saying Turkey has a "big brother" mentality in Iraq. Barham agreed

BAGHDAD 00000183 002.2 OF 002

there was an element of "imperial arrogance" in Turkey's approach, but also remarked on PM Erdogan's desire for Gulf Arab financial support. He also attributed Turkey's interest in Iraq and the Iraqi Kurdistan Region (IKR) to Turkey's energy needs.

KIRKUK, U.S. CONSULATE

¶10. (C) Salih raised the issue of a U.S. consulate in Erbil, as he had during the visit of USUN Ambassador Rice. The Ambassador wondered what the consulate's district would be and urged Salih to help find solutions for the disputed internal boundary (DIBs) territories. Salih rejoined, with a laugh, "We're not going to give away Kirkuk for a consulate."

On another note, Salih said that he was following through on his invitation to Arabs from Hawija to come to Erbil to talk.

OLIVE BRANCH TO GOI ON PRE-2005 OIL FIELDS

¶11. (C) Asked about the state of GOI-KRG negotiations regarding oil contracts and revenue-sharing, Salih informed the Ambassador that the KRG that day had announced new steps to try to resolve its dispute with the GOI on the Kurdistan Region's two producing, pre-2005 oil fields. The KRG had posted the two contracts on its web site (a key GOI demand), and PM Salih had written a letter to PM Maliki announcing KRG willingness to resume exports from these fields. As had been the case in the summer of 2009 -- prior to the KRG's cessation of exports over the dispute about how the producers would get paid -- the proceeds would go first into the GOI's coffers. Meanwhile, the two sides would negotiate how the two producing companies, Turkey's Genel Enerji and Norway's DNO, would get paid. Salih explained that all the KRG sought was that the companies' costs) not their profits) would be paid out by the GOI from the totality of the proceeds, rather by the KRG from its coffers. Salih said he had Barzani's complete support in this initiative. The Ambassador praised the positive steps taken by the KRG and urged that the KRG and the GOI to reach an agreement on this

issue and work to pass the hydrocarbons law. (Note: Barzani later told Team Leader the KRG's move was in response to PM Maliki's public comments in early January expressing a desire to resolve oil disputes with the KRG. End note.)

MERGING KRG SECURITY FORCES, BUDGET

¶12. (C) Salih said the merger of the PUK and KDP Peshmerga was "real" and "serious" and would start with four brigades. Noting that USFI CG GEN Odierno has promised to help with the merger, Salih added that if the GOI were smart, it should support the merger. Asked about the asayish, Salih said there was a legal issue requiring legislation in the Iraqi Kurdistan Parliament (IKP). He said the KRG would turn its attention to passage of this legislation following passage of the KRG budget, which he and DPM Barwary were on the verge of submitting to the Council of Ministers. Salih proudly said it was the KRG's first unified budget. (Note: Until the formation of the Sixth Cabinet under Salih in October, the KRG had always had two finance ministers, one for KDP and one for PUK. End note.) Salih noted that the new budget includes a financing mechanism for political parties, which would greatly reduce the parties' level of funding. Salih said the budget would show a significant deficit because the GOI is not yet paying Peshmerga. The Ambassador stressed the importance of merging all Kurdish armed forces under a unified command.

KUWAIT, UMM QASR AND THE IDEA OF A LAND BRIDGE

¶13. (C) Salih expressed some sympathy for the Kuwaitis' wariness of Iraq because of the tendency of Iraqi politicians to view Kuwait as a nuisance, with no sense of remorse for Iraq's 1990 invasion. DPM Barwary added that Maliki, Hashimi QIraq's 1990 invasion. DPM Barwary added that Maliki, Hashimi and many other Arab Iraqi politicians would grab Kuwait if they had a chance. Salih said he sees these politicians' attitude towards Kuwait as a kind of litmus test for how they really think about Kurds. Regarding the GOI's hopes to develop Umm Qasr as a major port, Salih laid out a vision whereby a good rail link from Umm Qasr through Kurdistan to Turkey could save ten days of shipping time for goods going from East Asia to Europe.

PARTICIPATION

¶14. (SBU) Ambassador Hill travelled to Erbil January 18 for separate meetings with KRG President Barzani and KRG PM Salih. Barzani was joined by Dr. Fuad Hussein, KRG Presidency Chief of Staff, and Falah Mustafa Bakir, head of the KRG's External Relations Department. Salih was joined by Deputy PM Azad Barwary (KDP), Falah Mustafa (KDP), and Chief of Staff of the Council of Ministers Dr. Nouri Sinjari (KDP). The Ambassador was joined by Senior Advisor for Northern Iraq (SANI), PolCouns, RRT Erbil Team Leader, and Poloff. HILL